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Different spaces: Exploring Facebook as heterotopia by Robin Rymarczuk and Maarten Derksen

Abstract

In this paper we explore the space of Facebook, and use Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia to describe it. We show that the heterotopic nature of Facebook explains not only much of its attraction, but even more the discomfort that many people, users as well as non-users, experience in it. Analysing Facebook as a heterotopia brings its relation to other spaces into focus: it is a world in the world, that juxtaposes and merges other spaces into *'une espace autre'*.

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Introduction

Facebook is commonly described as a social networking site. In studies and discussions of its phenomenal success and popularity, as well as of the recently increasing discontent with it, the emphasis has mostly been on social networking. To explain both use and non-use, it is natural to look at the way Facebook facilitates social relationships, at the kind of relationships that its users form, and at the traits of the people who enjoy networking on Facebook and those who do not [1]. What has remained somewhat underexposed is the fact that Facebook is a site. Albeit virtual, it is a bounded space with certain properties. "The foundational feature of virtual worlds is that they are places", according to Tom Boellstorff (2011). The fact that virtual worlds are places leads Boellstorff to conclude that they can be construed not just in terms of globalized online networks, but in terms of space, landscape and localities as well [2]. In this perspective, Facebook is a world within the world that attracts or repels people by its geography as much as by its social life. Or better: Facebook society is structured to an important extent by its spatial characteristics, much like 'real', non-virtual societies adapt to their location and cultivate its particular landscape. How comfortable you feel in such a society depends in part directly and indirectly on the space it occupies. Thus, we are concerned here not primarily with what users do on Facebook, but with what Facebook, considered as a space, does to the user.

In this paper, we explore the space of Facebook, and use Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia to describe it. We show that the heterotopic nature of Facebook explains not only much of its attraction, but even more the discomfort that many people, users as well as non-users, experience in it. Whereas Facebook is attractive to many primarily as a social networking tool, it is repulsive to some as a site, a heterotopia. Our primary aim is theoretical and exploratory: we investigate the possibility of analyzing Facebook as a heterotopia, comparing the features of Facebook with Foucault's exposition of the concept. Secondly, we illustrate this analysis with statements from Facebook users and former users (commonly called 'quitters') and with results of several recent studies of social media usage. As Facebook has grown, so has the volume of reflections on it, from users, but also from commentators (on blogs and online news sites, for instance) and researchers. The last few years, talk about and studies of Facebook increasingly focus on the growing discontent among users. Several dedicated Web sites exist where users and quitters can vent their complaints, discomfort, and anger, such as quitfacebook.info (<http://quitfacebook.info/>) and quitfacebookday.com (<http://www.quitfacebookday.com/>). Even on Facebook itself there is a community of users sharing their hate of Facebook (the 'I hate Facebook' page). Predictably, other sites and groups have sprung up where users profess their love of Facebook, although this group appears to be less vocal than the discontented. Many bloggers have also written about their own or others' experiences with Facebook, or have reflected on Facebook and its phenomenal popularity from a more distanced perspective. Here too, worry and discontent appear to be on the rise. Finally, Facebook and its users have been the object of media studies since its early days, and in several recent studies [3] the anger and annoyance of users and quitters is an important focus. We draw on all these sources [4] to illustrate our argument that Facebook can be fruitfully conceptualized as a heterotopia, since it clarifies in particular the nature of this discontent, and draws its various aspects together. We hope our argument will invite further study along the same lines.

Heterotopic spaces

The concept of heterotopia made a first, brief appearance in the preface of Foucault's (1966) *Les Mots et les choses* (translated into English in 1970 as *The order of things*). In a lecture titled 'Of other spaces,' Foucault (1967) elaborated on the concept, describing a heterotopia as a space that disrupts the continuity and normality of common everyday places. Because they break down boundaries within and between places into spaces of 'otherness' (*des espaces autres*), Foucault called them heterotopias. Like utopias, heterotopias relate to other spaces by both representing and at the same time inverting or distorting them. Unlike utopias, which are unattainable and inherently unreal, heterotopias are real spaces. A cinema, for example, is a space of otherness amid more ordinary spaces, "a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space." [5] In it, the real world and the fiction of the movie are juxtaposed, and the visitors are drawn into the story of the heroes and villains projected on the screen. In 'Of other spaces,' Foucault formulated six principles of 'heterotopology', the "sort of systematic" description of heterotopias [6]. The first principle entails the assumption that every culture in the world creates heterotopias, although they can take varied forms. The second principle states that

"a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion; for each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another." [7]

Society guides, pushes and makes established heterotopias change or adopt novel functions and new meanings because these other spaces are intrinsically embedded in a changing culture. The cemetery, for example, "certainly a place unlike ordinary cultural spaces", used to be centrally located next to the church, but the idea of death as a source of illness caused cemeteries to be moved near suburbs. "The cemeteries then came to constitute no longer the sacred and immortal heart of the city, but the other city, where each family possesses its dark resting place." [8]

Foucault's third heterotopic principle is that "the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible." [9] This is the defining character of heterotopias. Heterotopias merge certain spaces, like "private space and public space, family space and social space, cultural space and useful space, the space of leisure and that of work" into spaces of otherness [10]. Such other spaces enter into relationships with their surroundings to constitute peculiar spaces with attributes entirely their own. The fourth principle entails that "heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time", often breaking with traditional time in certain spaces [11]. Fairgrounds and festivals, for instance, use time in a temporally finite fashion, that is, they appear and then disappear again — existing only in short intervals. The cemetery, on the other hand, disregards time, while museums and libraries accumulate it. Entering or leaving such a place of inversion and distortions can't be done freely. The fifth principle states that "heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable." [12] Only by performing a certain act, like payment, registration, identification, demonstration, purification or worship, do you get permission to enter or leave. If we do not adhere to the rites, permission is withheld. Finally, the sixth principle is that "heterotopias have a function in relation to all the remaining space." [13] In 'Of other spaces,' Foucault describes this function as unfolding between two extremes: between providing an illusion that exposes the real world as still more illusory, and providing a space of perfection to compensate for the flaws of real life. The otherness of a heterotopia, whether it is characterized by illusion or by perfection, calls into question the reality of the ordinary spaces around it. Heterotopias are disturbing.

Cyberspace as heterotopia

The concept of heterotopia has proven itself useful in the critical analysis of many places. Disney World, for example, has been described as a magical small world that both represents and distorts Western consumerist society; it teaches children a belief in enjoyment, the necessary means for which are only available through the market (Bruchansky, 2010). Other heterotopic analyses have focused on language and art [14], identity and experience [15], politics [16] and notions of geographical space [17]. Given this broad body of research, it is not surprising that cyberspace invited similar analyses when it came to prominence in the 1990s. McKenzie Wark saw a "new and very particular kind of space (...) unfolding before our eyes." [18] Writing before the advent of 'Web 2.0,' Wark analysed the differences between the spaces represented by analog photo and film and the new cyberspace created by computer graphics. Wark pointed out that Foucault's description of the ship, the "heterotopia par excellence" [19], as a "placeless place" applies to cyberspace as well, "particularly when it is a network, linking terminals in difference places and times into a unified environment." [20] Sherman Young (1998) likewise noted the heterotopic qualities of cyberspace but added the important qualification that it is multiple: cyberspace as a whole can be considered as a heterotopia, but within it there exist heterotopias as well, ranging from "sex-based chat-rooms to commodified digital libraries." [21]

Heterotopia is a concept that is easily abused. Young (1998) quotes Benjamin Genocchio's misgivings: "scouring the absolute limits of imagination, the question then becomes: what cannot be designated a heterotopia?" Thus Young asks "what can be gained from suggesting that cyberspace is a heterotopia?" [22] He sees the answer in Foucault's final principle, that heterotopias function in relation to all other space, the point being, according to Young, that heterotopia is a useful concept in so far as the heterotopic space invites reflection on its relation to other spaces. Peter Johnson (2013) argues "that although the uses of Foucault's accounts of heterotopia are bewilderingly diverse, heterotopias are most productively understood in the context of Foucault's insistence on 'making difference' and their adoption as a tool of analysis to illuminate the multifaceted features of cultural and social spaces and to invent new ones." [23] For example, Haider and Sundin (2010) offer a critique of the continuation of the Enlightenment ideal in their analysis of *Wikipedia*. They write that "while a cynical interpretation of *Wikipedia*'s reliance on other texts and outside sources, could be called 'source positivism', or be described as a late modern strategy in which text is everything, seeing it as a digital heterotopia allows us to offer a more positive interpretation." It helped them reframe its process and relations in spatial terms, "as a site of juxtaposition and simultaneity, a digital memory place in which people meet and create knowledge and knowledge structures, and most of all as a space which constantly changes." In this way, a heterotopic analysis can serve what Foucault termed a 'critical morality,' a style of critical thinking that emphasizes interconnectivity and avoids postulating 'an essential, universal, autonomous or interior cause.' [24] This is the kind of analysis that we attempt here.

A system of opening and closing

All heterotopias regulate access with a system of opening and closing. Only on condition of performing certain acts like purification, identification, registration, payment, demonstration or worship, permission to enter is granted. In his analysis of Disney World Bruchansky (2010) notes that its "experience is only possible because Walt Disney World is a closed space with an entrance fee." Mickey Mouse can only exist through a monetary offering. Although Facebook is free, it does have a system of opening and closing. A user can only enter the space of Facebook when registration and identification (self-disclosure) has been completed. When entering Facebook, users are carefully guided through its features and are taught where to post and read. Then they are asked to identify and register themselves. If the user follows the rules of conduct correctly they can start immersing themselves in the world of Facebook. Inside, openness and restrictions are combined in a way that sometimes jars. On the one hand Facebook promises the user "the power to share and make the world more open and connected" (Facebook, 2011), and has the allure of being completely open, accessible and democratic. Yet on the other hand it constitutes a heavily gated community with all-powerful, omnipresent but invisible system moderators behind controls. Moreover, it's often pointed out that heavy dues have to be paid upon entering. The user has to agree to *terms of agreement* — a contract essentially stripping away all property claims of information posted within this space.

"Did you catch the recent Terms of Service updates from the nice folks at Facebook? If you're like me, you deleted it without even reading — assuming they were doing something to further encroach on your privacy and protect their own tails from the shady stuff they're doing with our info". Dustin Stout (2013), Facebook quitter, Google+.

"These kinds of terms are pretty common these days, which is unfortunate, because some of them border on the ridiculous." Woodrow

Hartzog (quoted in Jefferson, 2012), assistant professor at Cumberland School of Law, Samford University.

Facebook's system of opening and closing has the increasingly criticized characteristic of making it rather difficult to leave the space entirely. You can, of course, log off any time, and deactivating your page (effectively hiding its information from other users) is fairly straightforward, but permanently deleting a page is an option that is not easily found. When you deactivate a page, Facebook keeps all of its content. The information remains easy to access, as only one login attempt sets everything back into place like you've never left. Permanently deleting your information, however, is quite difficult. As Jennifer Golbeck (2014) discovered, deleting all your past activities on Facebook is cumbersome, since Facebook only allows deleting each 'event' separately. Moreover, 'liking' and 'friending' cannot be deleted, only undone by the actions of unliking and defriending. (The process of deleting can be automated using third-party software, reducing the time involved in Golbeck's case from 20 minutes per one month worth of posts to one hour for her whole Facebook history.) To actually delete your account you must find your way through five pages until you get to the point where you can request Facebook to eliminate it [25]. Thus, Facebook's system of opening and closing is like a funnel: users are drawn in, usually without realizing what price they are paying, and once inside they discover it is difficult to find the exit. The way Facebook opens and closes is often by means of a trade-off. For instance, Facebook offers a sense of increased control and oversight over social connections while it denies privacy. Moreover, Facebook isolates at the same time as it exposes: it liberates the user from the constraints of distance yet confines him to a screen.

A different kind of time

Today temporality has become paramount for the digital mode of production, rivalled only by narrativity. The plasticity of time within new media and emerging real-time technologies remove the temporal boundaries of the actual world. Paradoxically though, in the accounts of Facebook rejectors and quitters, 'time suck' is a common complaint. Facebook has a disconcerting tendency to demand ever more time.

"Do you, like me, sometimes wonder where the day went to? Sometimes, before I know it, 3.00pm has come around and it's time for school pick up." Lindsay de Swart (2012), blogger, *HappyMotherCoach*.

Many articles have been devoted to finding out how much time people spend on Facebook (Pempek, *et al.*, 2009), as well as what the relationship is between this amount of time and all kinds of variables (Choi and Edge, 2012 on perception of others, Kalpidou, *et al.*, 2011 on well-being, Elphinston and Noller, 2011 on relationship satisfaction and Hanson, *et al.*, 2010 on time management in education). However, it pays to consider more closely users' and quitters' reflections to see what the term 'time' covers; it refers not only to the *amount* of time spent or wasted on Facebook, but also to the *kind* of time that Facebook offers. With the '*espace autre*' comes a different kind of time. Foucault noted that the otherness of heterotopic space often includes a distinct regime of time, a heterochrony: the recurring frantic brevity of the festival, for example, or the steady accumulation of the library, or the quiet eternity of the cemetery. Comparing Facebook to the latter two heterotopias is particularly instructive, since it shares traits with them but also combines them and adds a dimension that marks it as an altogether new kind of heterochrony. Like a museum, Facebook accumulates time. Fragmented bits of personal information, supposedly reflecting a particular present moment, are uploaded to construct a kind of linearity — like a narrated story. By facilitating and storing constant, real-time conversation, the platform creates a detailed log of a digital personal past. The timestamp of each entry highlights the temporality of the log. Compared to a museum, which seeks to store a particular selection of objects outside of time, the past on Facebook enters into relationships with the present much more readily. This peculiar characteristic reveals itself when we consider the growing permanence of a personal past that influences social relations and sense of identity in the present. Everything and everyone is readily available to be brought back into consciousness. A message once sent, a remark once made or a picture once posted could be fed back into the present at any time.

"It's unsettling to see the past presented as clearly as the present. It's your life in context, all in one place." Ben Werdmuller, chief technology officer at Latakoo, cited in Wortham (2011).

The mandatory Facebook profile format called the *timeline*, which exposes an individual's entire digital history on one long, scrollable page, wasn't only rejected by non-users, but was generally disliked by users as well. In a survey conducted by Cluley (Sophos, 2011), 51 percent of people interviewed said they were worried about the timeline. Preston Waters (2012) cites users that expressed this concern. "I don't want a timeline on my Facebook — why do you force me to have one?" and "I hate Facebook timeline design with a vengeance. More frippery and less function. Why are they forcing it on us?" Even more remarkably, there are two Facebook pages that are fully devoted to hating the timeline. For some, however, the timeline was a love at first sight.

"My take on Timeline is completely different. I really like it. I completely align behind another statement that Facebook made in the same blog post. 'Timeline gives you an easy way to rediscover the things you shared, and collect your most important moments.'" Kate Hayes, blogger at *adventuresinparenting.me* (2012).

While the majority of users have since tolerated it, many others came to enjoy (some) of its features.

"As I've said I had mixed feelings with this function but it was just two nights ago that I was convinced of how promising Timeline is. Timeline allows you to sort of like time travel through your, well, Timeline. And damn, the moment you start doing that, you can't help but be reminiscent and be instantly taken back through the years and months that have passed. I even found photos of me that I did not know were there. I don't know if you find it appealing but I do, knowing specially how sentimental I could get. I really really like it." Bianca Felipe, blogger at *winkingrevenge.tumblr.com* (2013)

"I have since come to realize I can create somewhat of an autobiography by posting items (pictures, scanned documents, etc.) and dating them appropriately. I could never recreate my past in this way by myself. First of all, I don't know any other tool that provides the combination of functionality that Facebook does. Surely there's nothing that would allow me to slowly record a retrospective with input from many people who were there at the time or who experienced similar episodes and milestones." Rick Ladd, blogger at *rickladd.com* (2012)

The heterochrony that the timeline creates is an important cause of the aversions of some (non)users and of the fondness of others. The initial *wall* format of the profile allowed the user to select elements (pictures, etc.) to create a particular (re-)presentation of oneself at a particular moment in time. The timeline on the other hand makes your entire Facebook history visible in reverse chronological order, and does so automatically. Liam Mitchell (2014) has emphasized the effortlessness of the timeline. "In collecting and arranging personal and social details, Timeline generates a record of users' lives: it poses their selves in front of themselves as browseable collections of interesting information — and because Timeline does this, the entire process requires a minimum of effort." Some users and quitters, however, are worried by this effortless browseability of their selves. As more information about their lives becomes visible and the past remains easily available for others to view and examine, a digital life lived in this fashion puts extra demands on performance. Creating a solid and consistent digital self-image requires an active process of seeking out these social fossils, carefully managing those remnants of the past, shaping them into a satisfying cohesion for a self-image in the present.

"What does it mean to not be able to reinvent yourself after high school, after college? Will people completely go back and edit their histories? And how will that shape the way we view ourselves and our friends?" Nicole B. Ellison, Professor of Information Studies at Michigan State University, cited in Wortham (2011).

"If you take advantage of Facebook Timeline's editing options, deleting select photos, hiding failed relationships, removing embarrassing events you attended — you can even kind of change it ... and without interrupting the space-time continuum." Kashmir Hill (2011), Senior Online Editor, *Forbes*.

For Facebook non-users, not wanting to construct and perform a certain Facebook persona and not wanting to collapse the past and the present into a heterotopic other time is a major reason to resist entering this space.

"It's a time machine. It's an eerie feeling — some have even called it creepy — to go back in time and see all your data compiled as a chronological scrapbook, recounting how many friends you made during a particular year, steps you've taken in your career, personal victories and defeats, and myriad things lost and gained." Charlie White (2011), former Senior Editor, *Mashable*.

"The Facebook Timeline will be a wake-up call to some that they have shared too much in the past, too freely. In my case, the Timeline was the catalyst to reassess my relationship with Facebook — and so I've killed my account." Graham Cluley (2011), Senior Technology Consultant at Sophos.

Facebook keeps the past present, but in a way that is much more direct because it is accessible in the same space where the present happens. The past becomes transparent in a way that many people, users as well as non-users, find unsettling. The past lives on in another way as well. Like a cemetery, Facebook houses eternity, but here the dead wander among the living. It's estimated that by 2015, there will be 50 million social ghosts or profiles without a living owner on Facebook (Good, 2010). As of 2012, 30 million people who maintained Facebook accounts have died, according to a report in the *Huffington Post* (2012). These profiles stay very active. There remains a high degree of interaction between friends, families, interested strangers and the Facebook avatar that has been left behind.

"Anyone you ever knew, people who have naturally faded from your life, will remain there and you will stumble into them and realize they are dead." Jed Brubaker, Ph.D. student at the University of California-Irvine, cited in Kaleem (2012).

Stephanie Buck (2013) quotes Scott Millin, caregiver and estate trustee of his late sister Nanci, which serves as a good example:

"The one thing I struggled what to do with [was] her Facebook page. I think Nanci's Facebook page is a virtual cemetery of sorts for me, as well as for her friends and family. Only we don't have to navigate winding roads and marble headstones to get there. Instead, we just click from any device and see her, remember her, leave messages, and smile or cry at what was and what has become."

Surprisingly, this interaction is bidirectional. Because of past activity, certain likes, preferences, updates, birthday notifications and suggestions will keep being generated and posted on one's timeline. In addition to that, companies like Dead Social (<http://www.deadsoci.al/>) offer the still-living user the option to create timed Facebook messages in advance, which will be distributed after death. The user is free to fill in the content of these messages.

"(T)he deceased's online identity not only continues in the virtual space; it can also evolve and adapt as others continue to interact with the dead person's profile." Michaelanne Dye, cyber anthropologist, cited in Buck (2013).

Although the digital world hasn't yet fully come to terms with digital death and what it exactly entails, the way that the merging of past, present, and future, of life and death within this heterotopia enters into a relationship with the space around it is already manifested in the concerns people report regarding grief and remembrance of those passed away.

"The stark immediacy of the form affects our very processes of thought and imposes different ways of seeing, of understanding and of being in the world. Facebook is a medium whose very characteristics distort relationships by creating an environment and a conversation that is as elusive, transient and disembodied as death itself." Deborah Rogers (2009), Professor of English at the University of Maine, *Times Higher Education*.

In sum, Facebook collapses past life, present life and afterlife into something very other.

Privacy concerns are the primary reason for resisting or rejecting Facebook. Baumer, *et al.* (2013) present results from their study on Facebook and non-use, focusing on those users who have left the service. Their analysis shows that "privacy emerged as a resounding theme, with over a quarter of respondents citing privacy concerns as an impetus for leaving, limiting, resisting, or considering leaving Facebook" ($N=410$). Similarly, Stieger, *et al.* (2013) report that "the main self-stated reason for committing virtual identity suicide was privacy concerns", accounting for 48 percent ($N=310$).

"The absolute worst aspect of Facebook is its complete disregard for the privacy or safety of its users. Telling everyone where you are, whether you want people to know or not, is outrageous. The entire site seems to be based around a strange, self-branding tango of exhibitionism and voyeurism." Rudy Simone (2012), blogger.

"On Facebook, you have absolutely no expectation of privacy." Tracy Mitrano (2006), Director of IT Policy and Computer Policy and Law Program at Cornell University.

Such complaints are readily understandable and tie in with a more general concern with privacy in society, for instance with regard to surveillance cameras.

"The Facebookification of the Web is a threat to openness, to choice, to privacy — but only if you care about those things." Natasha Lomas (2013), reporter for TechCrunch, *Daily Express*.

A heterotopic interpretation of Facebook looks beyond these familiar "privacy concerns". For instance, it is often claimed that Facebook, by continually changing its privacy policies, is rapidly shifting cultural norms around privacy, breaking down the barrier between what is considered to be public and private information. However, there is also something more fundamental going on than the process of changing privacy policies that influence Facebook use. The very distinction between public and private is rapidly becoming obsolete, and the boundaries between some of our every day places (e.g., work space and social space) are being blurred. It is a perfect illustration of Foucault's claim that in our epoch, "space takes for us the form of relations among sites." [26] Space is a prominent theme in our conception of privacy.

"Spatial metaphors continually recur in discussions of privacy, even in contexts that are not thought to involve spatial privacy at all, judges and scholars refer to 'spheres' and 'zones' to describe the privacy that the law should attempt to guarantee. The insistent recurrence of spatial metaphors in privacy talk suggests that something about the experience of privacy, and that of privacy invasion, is fundamentally and irreducibly spatial." [27]

In discussions of privacy on Facebook, space is an even more prominent issue. The question then is how to characterize the space of Facebook, in particular how it demarcates — or doesn't demarcate — private and public. Miller is quite clear on this issue: "(T)he normal distinction between public and private does not work for Facebook." [28] He notes how on Trinidad Facebook's popularity in part stems from the fact that its communities share characteristics with those of traditional village life. We believe this is a general feature of Facebook, not restricted to Trinidad. Facebook is not so much a novel way of relating to one and other, but rather a space like a traditional village, one without internal distinctions between private and the public. One's circle of 'friends' is a social sphere (to use McLuhan's term), that one shares life's events with, without distinguishing the trivial from the important, or the private from the professional. The common complaint that Facebook friends are not real friends is both on and off the mark. Facebook friends are neither 'real' nor 'fake', they're simply another kind of friend, just like we distinguish old friends, best friends, second-hand friends and friends from tennis. What typifies Facebook friends is that they are not friends as distinguished from strangers and from family, they are both and neither.

Regarding Facebook, privacy concerns emerge through its heterotopic nature: the fact that it juxtaposes incompatible spaces, but also the way it merges these spaces into '*une espace autre*'. This other space isn't produced by averaging what is private and what is public, but should be seen as a space where there is no such distinction. Some people flourish within this heterotopia and others don't. It very much depends on how attached one is to the distinction between the privacy of home and the publicness of society. We have inherited from the ancient Greeks a concern for the preservation of difference between these two spaces, between 'oikos (private sphere, household, hence economy) and agora (public sphere, the place of politics), a distinction that the Greeks held highest in their formulation of the polis — the ideal city or state" (Dehaene and De Cauter, 2008). Erasing this distinction, as Facebook does, poses problems for some.

"Can a living room become a bar, or a nook become a public park? If I change my statuses from private to public, then do the expectancies of those around me change as well? What about the interactions between someone who is private and another person who is public?" Rashmi Sinha (2009), blogger, *Rashmi's blog*.

"The issue for the social networking site is whether this tension between public and private, and people and profits, can ever be resolved." Bianca Bosker (2012), Executive Tech Editor, *Huffington Post*.

These are all questions about the relation between spaces without a division between private and public, and spaces in which that division is fundamental. This relation has peculiar effects. For instance, the ability to control the terms of self-exposure in networked space is largely illusory, since content intended for particular social networks is accessed with relative ease by family, employers and by peers. Consider for example the collapse of the space of work and the space of home. Bosses and colleagues pressure employees, often unintentionally, to accept their friend requests, consequently entering one's network. Hiriko Saito describes the predicament one can find oneself in:

"A 27-year-old employee of a Tokyo advertisement agency opened his Facebook account about a year ago to keep in touch with people close to him. But he can no longer post private matters now, because he has approved friendship requests from his superiors. Now, his daily routine includes checking out his bosses' postings and clicking the 'Like' button to indicate his approval." (Saito, 2013)

Facebook offers a space for each individual user in which the distinction between private and public does not hold, but Facebook as a whole is not an undivided space. Each user has her own circle of friends; each circle invisible to other circles, but connected via common users. News, gossip, pictures, opinions, jokes, and whatever else occupies a circle, thus spreads over Facebook, creating a new kind of public life. Miller sees this public as "an aggregate of private spheres" [29], but 'aggregate' strikes us as too static a term. Cyber-spheres are much more like criss-crossing ripples in a pond, since each is not a static object but a network that is in continuous flux, with its connections to other spheres changing at the same time.

Apart from group pages, devoted to particular institutions and events, public life happens through the intersection of tribes, each consisting of an individual's friends. Thus, although 'the public', the mass of Facebook users, is largely invisible to the users themselves, its productions can spread over the network. Facebook has turned on its head the distinction between a hidden private life and a visible public sphere. The private is shared among friends. The public on the other hand has become invisible, only known through what is shared between circles of friends.

The public is not invisible to the Facebook owners and administrators however. Together, the users' social spheres form one big network, owned and administrated by Facebook, the company. As Newton Lee (2013) explains, data mining in the age of big data is a lucrative business. "Using applied statistics and artificial intelligence to analyze complex datasets, companies repackage our private information for their own use as well as selling it to make a profit." [30] Many of the concerns over privacy on Facebook relate to the visibility of private information, for instance in the discussion about the default privacy settings, that have become ever more permissive. However, to the Facebook administrators, private information is only a means to an end. The goal of surveillance on Facebook is not to spy on the individual; people's individual lives are of no interest to Facebook. Within the limits of propriety (guarded by unseen moderators) people can behave whichever way they want on Facebook [31]. Facebook spies on the public, which only it can see. On Facebook, surveillance is primarily a means to commercial ends. In as much as Facebook disciplines the user, it is to behave in a way that makes it possible to collect information.

Collated into group data, individual data have great commercial value. Discipline is now effected through a different process, that can be termed 'coveillance'. Mann, *et al.*, coming from a post-panoptic paradigm, introduce the concept of coveillance to complement the top-down process of surveillance put forward by Foucault. "We term such observation that is side-to-side coveillance, an example of which could include one citizen watching another." [32] Users of social media platforms constantly have each other under coveillance, either through observing posts, finding out more information about both known and unknown individuals, or by sharing acquired content about others.

"We're used to thinking of the threat as 'us against them'. Now, because of the Internet and ubiquitous portable devices, there's a much more lateral threat as well. Kids can ruin each other's privacy without really even trying. They think they're just in a Facebook squabble, but there are a lot of other people who have access to that data. So there's both a Big Brother problem and a Little Brother problem. And that Little Brother problem has gotten worse." Lee Tien, senior staff attorney at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, in Milliard (2010), *Sacramento News & Review*.

This process of networked coveillance is intrinsic to the way social media function. In fact, it could be considered the second main function after communication. Like the Panopticon, it entails an expectation of being watched.

Between reality and illusion

A heterotopia has a function amidst the other spaces in a society. Because heterotopias are spaces of otherness, outside the normality of everyday life, their function revolves around the distinction between reality and illusion. Foucault gives the example of a brothel, 'a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory.' [33] In the case of Facebook, organised as it is around personal profiles, status updates and postings, it is the reality of personal identity that is at stake. On the one hand, many Facebook users rejoice in the fact that it gives them the ability to present themselves to the world, and to stay in contact with family and friends, wherever they may be. With Facebook, the presentation of self can be extended beyond face-to-face interaction to a global, yet immediate play of updates and chats. On the other hand, this new space is criticized because its inhabitants are inauthentic.

"I hated why there was no hint of authenticity on Facebook, that's why I left." John Piippo (2009), blogger, *Spiritual Formation*.

"Facebook and the proliferation of Instagram would have you believe that everyone else's children are living some glossy pictorial straight out of *Parents* magazine (...). It is not real. It's all spin — it's what they are putting out there for us to see." Jennifer Meer (2013), blogger, *Huffpost Parents*.

"(W)e are now attempting to forge relationships and make decisions based on phrases. Abbreviations. Snippets. Emoticons. Which may or may not be accurate representations of the truth." Susan Tardanico (2012).


The Facebook self is often characterised as a performance. "On Twitter or Facebook you're trying to express something real about who you are", writes Sherry Turkle [34], "but because you're also creating something for others' consumption, you find yourself imagining and playing to your audience more and more. So those moments in which you're supposed to be showing your true self become a performance. Your psychology becomes a performance." This strikes us as somewhat off the mark. This interpretation of Facebook as an 'unreal', fake space, again fails to recognize Facebook's heterotopic nature. As Goffman (1959) argued, the self is always a performance, in which individuals attempt to control the impression that others have of them. We should start with the question how online performativity differs from its off-line counterpart. Goffman identified as the basic dialectic of social interaction a play between moral demands and technical possibilities: In their performance, individuals will try to give the impression that they are living up to the (moral) standards required, but "qua performers, individuals are concerned not with the moral issue of realizing those standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized." [35] The technical part of this dialectic is greatly changed in Facebook. Postings offer new ways of presenting one's self, with the posting of photos (selfies, for example) perhaps the most prominent. At the same time, with the enhanced technical possibilities also come moral consequences. As we mentioned in our discussion of heterotopic time, the growing permanence of a person's online past, the longevity of postings and the ability of people to capture information influence social relations because they make much more of the self available for inspection.

"I also have friends who post adorable photos of their children (ostensibly taken moments ago), when I happen to also know that the child in question was actually vomiting all over them an hour earlier. Sure, this is funny, but it's also worth noting that we all are pretty much guilty of selectively crafting our Facebook personas. I certainly am as well, no doubt about it." Sarah Mackenzie (2013), blogger, *Daylight Blog*.

Moreover, coveillance and the ambiguity of being watched add a unique layer of complexity. Users of social media, like actors on stage, know that they are being observed by an audience. Thus, the heterotopia of Facebook on the one hand opens up a

new kind of space where selection, formulation and articulation of content is more readily available, but on the other hand the increased transparency puts added constraints on the performance and encourages questioning its authenticity. On the one hand, there are people who feel they can really be themselves on Facebook and experience it as a space where they finally come into their own. For example, Miller (2011) points out that to Facebook users on Trinidad, it is a place that allows one to show and share one's true self, considered to be variable, and mood and situation dependent by Trinis. Facebook's technical possibilities enable the user to present a constantly up-to-date representation of that changing self. However, Facebook's features also offer both new possibilities for inauthenticity and for its detection. One's holiday pictures with smiling people, good weather and great parties may draw ridicule from others who were there too and have pictures to prove it wasn't all that great.

Conclusion

Facebook has a more general function as well, one that makes it a heterotopia par excellence. We do not follow Miller in renouncing upon a general characterisation of Facebook because "there is no such thing as Facebook" [36], its character being determined by culturally different patterns of use. Facebook indeed is a diverse place, but nevertheless it has certain general traits that lie precisely in the way it relates to other spaces. Its general function, it seems to us, is best summed up by what Foucault considered to be typical of all heterotopias: they are "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted." [37] Facebook is a site that is able to reflect just about any other site in our culture — the office, the living room, the café, the amusement park, the brothel — at the same time turning them into something completely new. Facebook is '*un lieu sans lieu*' that mirrors, transforms and merges space with great speed and to a high degree. It can adopt many functions, but its general function is that of offering a general heterotopic medium. It is a moldable 'other space' that can be furnished in specific ways, but is always different from regular spaces. We believe it is this general heterotopic character that has made Facebook such a worldwide success. Foucault saw heterotopias in every culture, but Facebook goes one step further: it is a single heterotopia that has settled in almost every culture, by being adaptable to fit many different cultural practices. At the same time, as we noted, behind the Facebook of its many users, each with their own circle of friends, is the one overarching network of Facebook the company, a system extracting economic value out of the information generated by the users and their interaction. Facebook is both many and one, and this too makes it a heterotopia par excellence. Analysing Facebook as a heterotopia brings its relation to other spaces into focus: it is a world in the world, that juxtaposes and merges other spaces into '*une espace autre*'. Although many take to this new environment others find it unsettling, unreal and threatening. Like Foucault predicted, the question of space has become fundamental to our era. Facebook seems to have ushered us into a new phase in the process of answering this question. 

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Notes

1. See Di Capua (2012) and Wilson, *et al.* (2012) for recent reviews.

2. See also Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011) for an analysis of social media as spaces, in particular the way they are starting connect to the user's physical location.

3. See Madden, *et al.* (2013); Cluley (2011); Baumer, *et al.* (2013); and, Stieger, *et al.* (2013).

4. Users, commentators, and researchers are clearly overlapping categories: commentators and researchers are often themselves Facebook users, and part of the conversation on Facebook is an often sophisticated discourse about the site itself. Facebook does not allow a clean distinction between topic and resource, between user and researcher. Moreover, since in this paper we are interested in the characteristics of the space of Facebook, as articulated in the comments of users, quitters, and other commentators, rather than in the characteristics of the users *per se*, we feel justified in treating their comments equally.

5. Foucault, 1967, p. 26.

6. Foucault, 1967, p. 24.

7. Foucault, 1967, p. 26.

8. Foucault, 1967, p. 25.

9. Foucault, 1967, p. 27.

10. Foucault, 1967, p. 23.

11. Foucault, 1967, p. 27.

12. Foucault, 1967, p. 28.

13. Foucault, 1967, p. 29.

14. Anderson (1994) on poetics and tragedy, Bryant-Bertail (2000) on theatre, Soffer (2010) on off-shore radio and Chung (2012) on transnational film.
15. Barrera (2003) on illegal migrants, Bondy (2012) on Latin sexuality, Gordon (2003) on mateship and Dove-Viebhahn (2007) on gender hybridity.
16. Boedeltje (2012) on European geopolitics, Damjanov (2013) on biopolitics and Nichols (2010) on post-colonialism.
17. Bonazzi (2002) on the relationship between space and culture, Guarrasi (2001) on postmodern geography and Harvey (2000) on cosmopolitanism.
18. Wark, 1993, p. 140.
19. Foucault, 1967, p. 27.
20. Wark, 1993, p. 144.
21. See Henthorne (2010), Håndlykken (2011) and Liff and Steward (2003) for further applications of the concept of heterotopia to cyberspace.
22. *M/C Journal* (<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal>), in which Young's article appeared, is an online publication and does not have page numbers.
23. Johnson, 2013, p. 2.
24. Peter Johnson, 2014. "Heterotopian studies," at <http://www.heterotopiastudies.com/author/peter-johnson/page/10/>.
25. 11. To delete an account one must first log in, scroll down to the bottom of the page and then click the link to the Help center. Next, one has to enter the Privacy Settings and scroll down the page until the link 'deactivating, deleting and memorializing accounts'. Click on 'how do I permanently delete my account', go through (or read) the information and then click on the word 'here' (hyperlinked). This action generates a request which will prompt Facebook to delete the account, albeit with a 14 day 'change your mind period'.
26. Foucault, 1967, p. 23.
27. Cohen, 2012, p. 12.
28. Miller, 2011, p. 174.
29. Miller, 2011, p. 175.
30. Lee, 2013, p. 62.
31. We do recognize that Facebook, through its default settings and its design, nudges its users to behave in ways that best serve its own ends.
32. Mann, *et al.*, 2003, p. 338.
33. Foucault, 1967, p. 27.
34. Turkle, 2011, p. 112. In *Life on the screen* (1995), Sherry Turkle describes how taking on a different persona online had possible therapeutic effects. Ten years later, Turkle comes to a complete turnaround with a heart-felt critique on the medium she so extensively promoted.
35. Goffman, 1959, p. 162.
36. Miller, 2011, p. 163.
37. Foucault, 1967, p. 24.

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Different spaces: Exploring Facebook as heterotopia

by Robin Rymarczuk and Maarten Derksen.

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